



United States  
of America

# Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 111<sup>th</sup> CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 155

WASHINGTON, MONDAY, MARCH 16, 2009

No. 45

## Senate

The Senate met at 2 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable JIM WEBB, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Virginia.

### PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Everlasting God, who commanded light from darkness and divided the waters into sea and dry land, great and wonderful are Your works. By Your power and might, sustain our Senators this day. Lord, give them the courage to embrace the good and to avoid the evil. When they are fainthearted, strengthen them. When they are weak, support them. When they feel doubts, infuse them with faith in Your power, mercy, and grace. Transform their work into an expression of their worship of You as You help them make a renewed commitment to excellence in words and deeds.

We pray in Your sacred Name. Amen.

### PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable JIM WEBB led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

### APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. BYRD).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,  
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,  
Washington, DC, March 16, 2009.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable JIM WEBB, a Senator

from the Commonwealth of Virginia, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,  
President pro tempore.

Mr. WEBB thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

### RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

### SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following leader remarks, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to H.R. 146, which is the legislative vehicle for the lands bill. At 5:30 p.m. today, we will have a cloture vote on the motion to proceed.

On the lands bill issue, Dr. COBURN is supposed to give me some amendments today that we will take a look at and see whether we are going to be able to work something out to have some amendments offered. As my colleagues know, we are back again with this issue. This represents a number of bills that have been held up—a number of these bills have been held up for some time over the past year. In the House, an issue came up, and they amended it and put it on the consent calendar, and it failed by two votes. They didn't get the two-thirds, so it comes back here. I hope we can work something out; otherwise, we will just proceed as we have in the past. Sometime tomorrow, we will be on the bill, probably at about 4 o'clock. We will offer an amendment at that time and proceed to do what we need to do. Dr. COBURN has indicated to me that he won't require reading of the amendment, which could take a lot of time, but we will see what we can work out with him and move forward as quickly as we can.

### ADDRESSING AMERICA'S PRIORITIES

Mr. REID. Mr. President, this weekend, we learned that AIG doled out \$165 million in bonuses to their senior executives—bonuses paid for with taxpayer-funded bailout dollars. With millions of Americans out of work, staying up nights trying to figure out how to make this week's paycheck last until the next paycheck, wondering how they will make the next mortgage payment or pay the overdue bill—maybe even a tuition bill—these executive bonuses are beyond even outrageous. I don't know what a term is that is more definitive than "outrageous," but "outrageous" does the trick. These bonuses being paid are outrageous.

President Obama has instructed Secretary Geithner to pursue every legal avenue to address this grievous abuse of taxpayer money. I applaud that effort. Our financial sector will never heal unless the financial companies that helped create this economic crisis begin to regain the public trust. The actions of AIG do just the opposite, and every American is justified in their outrage at this breach of public trust.

President Obama was asked recently about the role of bipartisanship in addressing America's priorities. He said that it is the job of the majority to be inclusive and of the minority to be constructive.

In the early days of the 111th Congress, Democrats have worked to be inclusive. We have achieved considerable legislative success: passing a major lands bill which we will return to later this week, as I have indicated; the children's health insurance bill to provide health coverage to millions of children of low-income families; the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act to ensure the principle of equal pay for equal work; the President's Economic Recovery Act to begin stabilizing our economy and addressing the fiscal crisis this President inherited; and, of course, we passed the Omnibus appropriations bill,

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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which was unfinished business from the Bush Presidency. This important legislation funds Government for the rest of the fiscal year and provides funds to help meet the needs of the American people. This success has come when Democrats and Republicans have put politics aside to find common ground.

This week, we will return to consideration of a package of more than 160 public land bills, as I mentioned earlier, that will protect our environment and natural resources for generations to come. This lands package has been called, by editorial writers all over the country, the most significant environmental legislation in more than a quarter of a century.

Chairman BINGAMAN and Senator MURKOWSKI did an outstanding job of working together in the committee. The Senate followed their example by approving the bill earlier this year by a strong bipartisan majority of 73 votes. As we near the finish line on this legislation, I hope Senators from both parties will continue to follow the bipartisan example set by Senators BINGAMAN and MURKOWSKI by once again voting to pass this legislation.

We will also vote on several nominees to President Obama's administration. We hope to do it in the next few days. As our new President attempts to overcome the enormous burdens he inherited from the previous administration, it is critical that we help him succeed by providing him with all the tools, staff, and expertise he needs.

Starting this week, Members will begin to discuss President Obama's budget for the 2010 fiscal year.

Less than 2 months into his term, President Obama has already taken bold and necessary steps to begin the long climb out of the deep ditch that was left to him by the previous administration's fiscal policies. We have begun to take the necessary steps to get our economy back on track, save and create jobs, restore confidence in the markets, and help families keep their homes. President Obama's budget will build on those near-term investments by laying the groundwork for a longer term path back to broad prosperity for all Americans.

The President's budget is built on the promise that no matter how difficult our immediate challenge, we have to keep focused on the future. We will do that by investing in health care, education, and a cleaner more affordable energy policy, while providing tax relief and helping middle-class Americans afford to purchase and stay in their homes.

These are some of the most serious issues we have ever faced, and we face them together. We must all realize that. As we move forward, we have a choice to make. Those who are opposed can try to block us or they can work with us to accomplish the critical needs of the American people. I am confident it will be the latter.

## RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

## A THREATENING BUDGET

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, Americans are beginning to get a sense of what the administration's budget means to them. I think it is fair to say that most of them are worried that it spends too much, it taxes too much, and it borrows too much.

At a moment when the economy is already seriously challenged, when more people every day are struggling just to make ends meet, and when the national debt is already staggeringly high, Americans were hoping for relief. Instead, they got a budget that threatens the biggest tax hike in history, record spending, and massive debt. This budget literally shocked a lot of people. Spending in this budget is so massive that some estimate more than 250,000 Government workers will be needed to spend it all.

This is consistent with the approach the administration and the Democratically controlled Congress have taken since the beginning of the year. In just 50 days since Inauguration Day, the Democratically controlled Congress voted to spend \$1.2 trillion, which works out to \$24 billion a day or \$1 billion an hour—most of it borrowed—and we are doing this all, of course, in the midst of a recession.

People across the country are understandably nervous about this kind of spending which won't create the jobs that are promised and which will cause further tax hikes in the future to pay for all the borrowing.

Today, I wish to focus on the tax portion of the budget, the various tax hikes the administration, of course, will need in an attempt to cover the budget's \$3.6 trillion price tag.

The administration says that 95 percent of Americans will not see a tax increase under this budget plan. Well, Americans might not see an immediate increase in their income taxes, but there is more than one way, as they say, to skin a cat, and there is more than one way for Government to take money out of your pocket. I will mention just three that the administration has proposed.

First, there is the proposed new energy tax which would tax everyone who uses energy, which, of course, is 100 percent of the population.

The administration estimates that its cap-and-trade proposal would raise about \$650 billion from gas and electric companies and other businesses. The first thing to note about this tax is that no one, not even administration officials, thinks this figure is even close to the amount that will actually be raised, and no one, not even administration officials, believes that every cent of it won't be passed along to con-

sumers. The President himself said during the campaign that his cap-and-trade plan would cause utility rates to "skyrocket." This is President Obama himself who indicated during the campaign that he thought utility rates under his plan would skyrocket. More recently, OMB Director Orszag publicly reaffirmed the administration's view that cap and trade would increase energy taxes for everyone. This means that anybody who turns on a lightbulb will feel the pain. How bad will it be? Well, researchers at MIT were a little more specific than the President and Mr. Orszag. These researchers at MIT predicted that the proposal would cost the average American household \$3,128 a year. Now, this is the average American household under this budget and the energy taxes it will levy: \$3,128 per household.

Most of the utilities and manufacturers that take a direct hit from the energy tax are big businesses, but what about the small businesses which account for nearly three-fourths of all new private sector jobs? Well, there is a tax for them too. Thanks to an income tax hike on anyone earning more than \$200,000 a year, many will see their taxes go up significantly. Think of a general contractor, a family restaurant, a startup technology firm. These are the engines of our economy. They are struggling now. They will struggle even more once these tax hikes go into effect.

Businesses with 20 or more employees get hit particularly hard. These businesses account for two-thirds of the small business workforce. The President's budget includes a tax increase on more than half of those businesses.

It is an iron rule of economics that taxes influence the decisions of those who are taxed. And businesses that have less income as a result of higher taxes are likely to do three things: cut jobs, put off buying new or better equipment, and take fewer risks. The real-world consequences of those decisions are immense: more jobs lost, less innovation, fewer new products, and lower salaries for employees, almost all of whom are probably making less than \$200,000 a year.

Hundreds of thousands of Americans are losing their jobs every month. Millions fear losing their homes. In response, the administration has promised in this budget a tax hike on the Nation's biggest job creators. These businesses are shedding workers already. Higher taxes will force them to shed even more.

I understand the administration's desire to make good on its promise of reforms. Most Americans understand that reforms are needed in health care, education, energy, and other areas. But they want the administration to fix the crisis in the financial sector first. Until we devote our full attention to that crisis, all other recovery efforts will be in danger of coming undone. With the highest unemployment rate in 25 years, Americans simply don't see the sense in raising taxes on small business.